

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 4, 2020

Michael J. Rigas
Acting Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20415

Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Rigas and Mr. Vought:

We write to express our concerns with plans to force federal employees to return to their worksites in numbers that may place them at risk during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The current guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is encouraging these unsafe actions, and we urge you to issue new guidance based on the best available science and health practices to ensure the safety of federal employees and to include adequate safeguards for surrounding communities from the increasing spread of COVID-19.

States across the country are reporting record breaking numbers of newly confirmed cases of COVID-19, and deaths in those states are now on the rise. As of August 3rd, more than 4,500,000 Americans have been infected with the coronavirus and at least 154,860 Americans have died. Now is not the time to send federal employees back into workplaces that will serve as a fertile ground for transmission of the coronavirus.

Much like our political leaders must set an example for our constituents by wearing masks and practicing other safety measures, our federal workforce must set an example for the private sector as we navigate this crisis. Federal employees and contractors have been teleworking successfully throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency, keeping vital services running and implementing economic relief programs and measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. These workers should not now be used as pawns to put pressure on state and local leaders facing difficult decisions regarding the upcoming school year, shutting down amidst a spike in cases, and a flu season fast approaching.

The current guidance is encouraging agencies to end maximum telework prematurely. COVID-19 is a deadly threat to anyone – and anyone can carry the virus and transmit it to others – but the current OPM/OMB guidance only supports sustained maximum telework throughout the pandemic for certain workers deemed to be high risk. Further, the guidance sometimes conflicts with direction from other members of the Trump Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state and local governments. Premature reopenings throughout the country have already prevented the United States from reversing even the first wave of COVID-19, and many states and localities have announced new shutdowns in response to the new spikes. Forcing

the federal workforce to reduce teleworking in this climate endangers the health and safety of not only the workforce, but those citizens who interact with agencies and everyone else in an agency's region through increased community spread.

In the National Capital Region, many federal agencies are bringing employees back to the office instead of teleworking even though the reopening guidelines for Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia all urge employers to continue telework as much as possible. Employees at Social Security Administration offices in New York and Massachusetts have reported plans to return to the offices from leadership requiring too many employees in the office to have sufficient social distancing, putting employees at unnecessary risk. National Park Service employees who have been prematurely forced to return to work have expressed concerns regarding the overall neglect of enforcement of proper PPE, and specifically mask, protocols from leadership, putting them at risk of being exposed to COVID-19 when interacting with the public.

Your current guidance endangers not only the health and safety of federal workers, but the health and safety of communities throughout the United States. We urge you to issue clearer guidance directing agencies to continue maximizing telework throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure any future plans to return employees to the office is developed in consultation with each agencies' employees and union representatives in accordance to each agencies' collective bargaining obligations.

Sincerely,



Deb Haaland

Member of Congress

David Trone
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

Denny Heck
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
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Ro Khanna
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Anthony Brown
Member of Congress